MY SINS OF OMISSION

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MY SINS OF OMISSION

This book has been crowned by the French Academy under the title of "Et Par Omissions."

MY SINS OF OMISSION

AN AVERAGE CATHOLIC'S EXAMINATION
OF CONSCIENCE

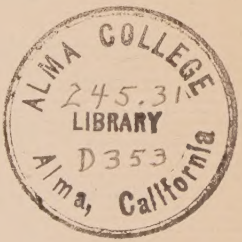
BY

JACQUES DEBOUT

TRANSLATED BY

J. F. SCANLAN

I say to you, as long as you did it not . . . neither did you do it to me.—Matthew xxv, 45



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PREFACE

Here, in the guise of an examination of conscience, is a brief compendium of our sins of omission.

It is not a book of devotion to be carefully perused immediately before going to confession.

The less so, because the note of self-accusation is more audible than the note of contrition. The less so, because the accent of humour is as acute as it is little grave, and not always very circumflex.

But—there is always a but—an examination of the kind is not utterly unreal, and this one is as comprehensive as possible of all our shortcomings and defects.

If it seems improbable in regard to any individual case, it is only too true of certain series.

An attentive reading of these pages, at times when we hear the voice of God alone addressing us, will enable many a one to recite his Confiteor

to the end, and prevent him merely gabbling " and by omission."

" And by omission " seems nothing at all in a night prayer, but we have the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ that it is quite simply the substance of the Last Judgement.

JACQUES DEBOUT.

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I accuse myself of having omitted my sins of omission—of having been satisfied for baggage on the journey to eternity with the wrong I have not done—of having been a Catholic by reaction, not in action—of having considered Catholic morality solely as a form of mortification and not as a system of life, as a suppression and not an expansion, as a brake and not a dynamo, as a railing and not a springboard. I accuse myself of having considered what good there was to be done as a duty rather ill-defined, optional in nature and quickly discharged, of having persuaded myself that the eternal wrath of God was provoked solely by impiety and sins against Holy Virtue, and of having dubbed " good Catholic " a man who goes to Mass on Sundays, performs his Easter duties and gives his neighbours no reason for gossip—and " excellent Catholic " a man who entertains the clergy at his table and carries a candle in the procession — and " exemplary Catholic " a man who thunders behind closed doors against the enemies of order and sound ideas.

I accuse myself, also, of having described as " angels " and " saints " members of the gentler sex who belong to " respectable families " and dress

in white or sport a confraternity ribbon without thereby ceasing to be above the average or worldly-minded.

I accuse myself of a marked inclination to think that, in performing the least pious or charitable work, we do *ever so much more than duty requires of us*, or at any rate that to do so is the superlative degree of our duty.

I accuse myself of having stereotyped my religion in a prescribed number of ritual acts and prohibitions, in a social attitude at most, and so having kept it in the rut of a routine, the circle of a caste or the confines of a party.

I accuse myself in general of having failed to realize that all the sins which are described as sins of commission have their roots in, and are themselves in reality, sins of omission.

OMISSION OF WORSHIP IN PRAYER

I accuse myself of having forgotten that prayer is an act of worship, of not having realized that the name of God must be sanctified, that His kingdom come and His will be done, before He gives us, or rather in order that He may give us, our daily bread.

I accuse myself of having worried God with my own interests without first concerning myself about

His. I accuse myself of having solicited His help like a pagan, solely in order to obtain successes or cures, especially when, after every human means had been tried and failed, supernatural intervention seemed to be either a trump card in the game or the last card to play.

I accuse myself of not having worshipped God with the whole of creation in the morning and the evening, in the ice and the clouds, in the dew and the mist, in the lightning and the mountains, in the plains and the seas, in the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, in the fish of the ocean.

I accuse myself of having gone my way and grown old amid all those altars and all those hymns with a soul which was blind and deaf, so excommunicating myself, priest of things though I be, from the universal act of homage.

I accuse myself of not having worshipped God with the whole of mankind and of having begun the Lord's Prayer only with my lips, of not having felt that, God being the "Our Father" of us men as He is the Author of the world, we ought to worship Him together for His goodness to us all.

I accuse myself of not having given a thought in my prayers to the history of God among my ancestors and my brethren, of not having blessed His name for Paradise, for His forgiveness on the evening of the Fall, for Abraham, for David, for

the prophets, for His Son Jesus, for His Apostles, His Martyrs, His Virgins, His Confessors, His Church, His Church which is one and triple like Himself, triumphant, suffering, militant in the same faith and the same baptism.

I accuse myself of not having realized that my prayer ought to be in the first place a humble moment in that perpetual adoration, and that the first word of the "Our" *Father* is meaningless if it does not unroll that procession in my heart.

I accuse myself of having neglected the appeals which the Liturgy makes to my sensibility and my imagination to help my soul to worship, of having taken no such interest in the seasons of the liturgical year, or in the colours of the ornaments, or in the rites of the ceremonies, or in sacred art or poetry, as would have enabled me so easily and with so much interior joy to raise myself to the Creator and Father along with nature and humanity.

I accuse myself of being ignorant, wilfully ignorant, of the prayers said at Mass, satisfied merely to attend—instead of taking part—telling my beads, turning the leaves of a commonplace prayer-book, or humming still more commonplace hymns—of being satisfied even to stand there like a sentry, and of having thought that I was worshipping God by sitting like an orderly through twenty minutes every Sunday at the latest and

shortest Mass, of having prayed at Mass and of having had Masses said only with a view to my personal needs, forgetting that that Commemoration of Calvary has above all an official and universal character, of having perverted to the sole form of a petition such of the words of worship, contrition and thanksgiving as I could remember, thinking, for example, that the primary object of a certain number of "Hail Marys" was not so much to do honour to the Blessed Virgin as to secure success in some examination.

I accuse myself of having made no attempt to discover in the Psalms and Scripture the sources and substance of my prayer of worship and of having chosen rather wearily to beguile the time than to attend evening devotions—of not having permeated myself with those emotions and reflections inspired by the Holy Ghost, consecrated by the Church, and impregnated for centuries past and in all countries with so much pious fervour and human anguish—of having in my thoughts of God entertained only an arid philosophy, a trivial or silly sentimentality, a reverie or impulse of a purely and poorly personal character—an aristocratic or rudimentary, modern or archaic, individualism, at all events a tendency to consider my own features at the very moment of attempting to worship God.

I accuse myself in general of not having, or of having imperfectly, realized the part played by worship in prayer.

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD

I accuse myself of having prayed but little or badly for the dead, of having thought of them only on certain days and along with the crowd, forgetting that they may need me every moment of the day, that they are more defenceless than children and that our thoughts should never abandon their painful cradle: forgetting that every single one of the dead needs every single one of us, and that a collective homage does not abate their suffering, which is still more individually felt than the suffering of the living.

I accuse myself of having felt for the dead a merely conventional piety on their Commemoration Day, of wearing a black suit, attending with perfect propriety and at the most a vague melancholy the services of the Church, taking flowers to the cemetery, and bowing my head over their graves without uttering a word to them or listening to what they might have to say, and so not praying with my soul.

I accuse myself of having considered All Souls' Day rather as "the New Year day of the dead,"

of having paid them merely a ceremonial visit and left my card. I accuse myself of thinking that I had discharged all my obligations to the dead in the war by having been moved at the unveiling of their monument as I listened to an operatic selection and the speech delivered by the Deputy Lieutenant.

I accuse myself of having thought about those dead only in the most conventional terms and, without realizing that I was doing so, in a " laic " manner, when I said to myself that we are indebted to them for victory, life and peace.

Because my conscience sounded " the Last Post " in honour of their valour and the country they saved, I think that I have given them a sufficient alms of glory. I accuse myself, therefore, of having believed that glory is sunshine to the dead and of having allowed myself so to be distracted from piety and prayer. So it comes about that the dead of the war *are of all the dead the most abandoned.* Upon the pretext of doing them homage, I have forgotten that there may be necessitous souls to succour in Purgatory.

I accuse myself of having practically forgotten the Dogma of Purgatory, of not having realized to what an extent it reveals the splendour of the divine justice, of not having realized that a too earthly soul, having caught a glimpse of Heaven,

itself experiences the admirable necessity of preparing itself the better therefor *by purifying itself*—that the dead are very great souls, which consider themselves not beautiful enough for the beauty of God, and which, like the Saints on earth, but more than the Saints, are consumed with a sublime ferocity of desire to eradicate every imperfection in themselves and to burn the old Adam.

I accuse myself of not having realized what a close association of souls the communion of Saints is, and that I am thereby enabled to help and even to deliver the dead.

I accuse myself of having forgotten that the Sacrifice of the Mass, being of infinite price, can, by the blood of Jesus, quench the flames of Purgatory round one of the dead, and that the dead have a frightful thirst for it. And I have not given them to drink!

I accuse myself of having thus, through thoughtlessness or latent rationalism, abandoned in their agony, for an indefinite time, those whom I loved best.

I accuse myself of not having been a Good Samaritan to the unknown dead who languish in the abyss, and of having gone my way without listening to their complaints, to the "Miseremini" which the Church borrows from Job and puts upon their pale lips. . . . I accuse myself of not having

realized that Purgatory is an immense appeal to charity on behalf of the dead, that it makes us live in their beneficent company, unceasingly requires from us a more immaterial and affectionate love than love in this world, and ever so much more efficacious proofs of love than our human gestures.

I accuse myself of not having realized that the dead see us more clearly, understand us better, love and inspire us more than in their penumbral life.

I accuse myself, therefore, in this month of the dead, of having suffered them, for lack of prayers and Mass, to lie in torment in the prison of their sins and my indifference.

I accuse myself of having, in my own heart, allowed the dead to die.

PRAYER FOR ONE'S SOUL

I accuse myself of not having prayed for my *soul with my soul*—of having dispatched only abstract prayers to God on its behalf, without regret and without desire—of having been content, where my soul was concerned, with acts of contrition or pious resolutions elegantly set forth, and with a grandiloquence of expression which absorbed all the emotion—of having made no attempt to infuse life into the academic style in which I

learned as a child to translate the miserable extent of my wretchedness by the opulence of the periods: "Behold me, O Lord, all covered with confusion! —O God, I would wish never to have offended Thee . . . ," and so forth.

I accuse myself of having seriously—and dare I say seriously?—entreated for my soul only *a happy death—salvation—and indulgences*—of having considered St Joseph only as an *unfailing ferryman* and the Blessed Virgin only as a *triumphant advocate*—of having valued *the numerous confraternities* merely with an eye to posthumous advantages and only because of the imposing number of days which the sum-total of them docks from my term in Purgatory—of having therefore made such a collection of rites and saving prayers that now I only pray *quantitatively*—of having so confused my spiritual life by a complicated ledger account of indulgenced pilgrimages and Bridgetted rosaries—of not having realized in fine that, while formulas and practices were the *symbol* of indulgences, interior disposition was the *cause*.

I accuse myself, therefore, of having been unconcerned about my supernatural beauty—of not having asked God to grant me *that coquetry* of the soul which is the exquisite form of *its love*—of having implored grace only as a means of salvation

and not so as to be beautiful with the beauty of grace *through living the life of grace*—of having considered grace only as a lightning conductor and not as a nuptial garment—*as a guarantee* and not *a value*. I accuse myself of having deplored my impurity merely as dangerous and not as vile, my selfishness as an error in calculation and not as an infirmity, my pride as a disorder and not as a deformity.

I accuse myself of not having solicited for my soul light and love: light upon my faith, light upon my life, light upon my neighbours, light which makes human things divine and divine things human, light which brings truth into life and life into truth—love which starves and slakes the thirst, love which excludes mediocrity and invites heroism, which makes every task an incitement towards fresh exertion, all suffering an incitement towards further sacrifice and the obscure possession of God an unbridled desire for a magnificent embrace.

I accuse myself of having been satisfied by a short-sighted theology with insuring my soul against fire instead of having allowed my heart to burn within me like the heart of the pilgrims on the road to Emmaus.

I accuse myself of having had no profound belief in the efficacy of prayer—of having believed in prayer only with my nerves, under the pressure of anguish and as a means in despair—of having prayed without fervour and simply not to make an enemy of God so long as I could rely upon my own resources, my calculations and my chances.

I accuse myself of having sought Providence almost exclusively in my own activity—of not having realized that if my action is to be strong, successful and useful, God must build the house and watch over the city—of not having realized that those who pray do more for the world than those who work, and that Joshua is overcome with faintness in the fight, when the outstretched arms of Moses grow weary in prayer.

I accuse myself of not having given an effort of prayer the first place in my apostolate—of not having first enlisted the co-operation of God and His Saints—of not having sought, before all other resources, the spiritual riches which I might have derived from the treasury of universal prayer and infinite merits.

If ever I solicited the heavenly Donors, I did

so with less precaution and zeal than more visible benefactors.

If ever I implored light from on high, I did so with the resolve to enlighten myself immediately by beacons less remote.

In the matter of establishing an enterprise or conquering a soul, I accuse myself of having trusted entirely to my own arguments, my own logic and my talent for persuasion, or again to the timely intervention of able intermediaries, leaving God only to back my request—or even turning to Him merely in order that He should hasten a victory which was slow in coming—and giving Him credit only so far as other instruments failed.

I accuse myself of not having realized that by prayer I might have rendered audible to certain hearts words which no tongue can utter—the only words which do not bewray my secret soul because they are not themselves bewrayed by their poverty of expression and accent—because the sound does not pervert the sense.

I accuse myself of not having given God time to act when I prayed and of having hastened immediately to His rescue with a prodigious fuss. I accuse myself, finally, of not having realized that prayer must obey laws of a supernatural nature and be able to wait, without

exasperation or passivity, for the bursting forth of the seed sown in the eternal heart of God.

OF INSISTENT PRAYER

I accuse myself of not having persecuted God with my prayers—of having forgotten the familiar parable of the two friends in which Jesus shows us importunity rewarded—of not having realized why the Father insists upon our insistence, so that our thoughts may dwell on Him the longer, the more fervently, the more impatiently—with the whole force and distress of unsatisfied need. It is through the holes of our poverty that God really makes His entry into us, and it is the consciousness of our wretchedness which earns us the consciousness of His power in His goodness.

I accuse myself of not having realized that, in letting us knock rather long at His door, God enriches us with our very own prayers before enriching us with the gifts we implore. That He makes us appreciate better the value of the benefit deferred. That He induces us to reflect upon the interests at stake and to clarify our conception of them, their expression and realization. That He so reminds us of the great law of the world, both in the supernatural and the natural order: that there is a period of gestation for every thing and

every grace presupposing the collaboration of Time, and Life and Hope.

I accuse myself of not having realized that my prayer is and always will be heard—that God hears my real voice, the voice of what is really good for me—that, if I ask for a stone, He understands me better than I understand myself when He gives me bread—that, if He does not remove the chalice, it is because the bitterness thereof is a blessing—that He gives me the answer I should like to receive if I saw everything in His light and on the plane of eternity.

I accuse myself again of having prayed like a fatalist—with too absolute a resignation to the inevitable will of God—instead of believing, with the enterprising simplicity of the saints, that my prayer can *force His hand.*

I accuse myself of not having realized that our prayers are parcel of His infinite prevision and that He takes them into account in realizing His designs upon us—that our prayers dispose Him in our favour, put Him in a way at our mercy, and endow us with His omnipotence—that prayer, in a word, is the mobilization of God.

I accuse myself, therefore, of never having entertained pretensions of such sublime insolence and of having been incapable, through weariness or discretion, of enlisting the *Great Friend.*

I accuse myself of never having accused myself of religious ignorance, of not even offering any excuse therefor, so normal does such an omission seem—of having been inclined to think that docility exempted me from the acquisition of knowledge, that such poverty of mind predisposed to the Kingdom of God, and that it would be an act of presumption to go beyond the faith of the charcoal-burner.

I accuse myself of having taken no interest whatever in Christian doctrine, upon the pretext of respecting the more its mysteries and sacred character—of having been convinced, also, that duty is of an exclusively practical nature, that in the intellectual sphere there is one obligation only and that to obey, that to be a good Catholic one should keep the commandments of God and the laws of the Church, that it is sufficient to recite the Apostles' Creed and also to be able to answer *Amen*.

I should be very much surprised if I were accused of heresy, and yet I am at bottom nothing but a pragmatist or relativist to whom Truth in itself is no great matter. I accuse myself, therefore, of not having loved God with my mind, and of having unconsciously repudiated Him, because to

affect no interest in His life and revelations is tantamount to a genuine atheism.

I accuse myself of having considered that the rudiments of the Catechism, which in my youth I failed to assimilate, constituted such a super-aliment for a good Catholic as would keep him from ever feeling hungry till death. I accuse myself of an inclination to think that the Higher Certificate ought to require greater attention than examinations in religious doctrine, that there is some good in Sunday school because it is an empirical means of collecting and keeping children together, but that it is not so much an education as a distraction, and that it differs from other forms of study, which open all doors, in leading to nothing serious. I accuse myself of having attended it in my youth in just such a mood, which I considered proper, and of having allowed my children to go in the same broad-minded spirit.

I accuse myself, also, of a strong inclination to think, without precisely admitting it, that religious knowledge was very nearly as boring as it was useless, that it was not intended for people in the world, and that to devote oneself to it required a quite exceptional vocation and devotion.

I accuse myself of having commiserated with and teased my worthy parish priest for being obliged to preach somniferous sermons to somnolent,

pious old women, considering that to be one of the small drawbacks of the job, without even a suspicion that the Word of God ought to reach ordinary men; telling myself, perhaps, that the parish priest himself would be astonished and almost scandalized to see a useful member of society present at his homilies—that a busy life is incompatible with such a melancholy way of killing time.

I accuse myself of having taken pains to discover in the list of Masses the Mass at which there was no sermon, even though it might be early in the morning, although I am not myself an early riser; and of having rejoiced in the bosom of my assembled family if, by a piece of good luck, that blessed Mass happened to be the midday one. On occasion, also, I have put up a prayer to St Expedit that it might be said as quickly as possible by some young curate hungry for his lunch. . . .

OF LISTENING TO SERMONS

I accuse myself of having listened to sermons without hearing what was said—of having taken the opportunity to glide into a neo-Buddhist quietude—of having sometimes given the attention one gives to a dangerous and complicated exercise, of having been solely concerned to see how my

parish priest would extricate himself, and of having translated at perilous points the Lucretian "suave mari magno" into this more convenient form of expression: "I'd rather be where I am than in his place."

I accuse myself of having picked the sermon to bits in order to make fun of my parish priest, diligently collecting his mistakes, his improprieties of expression, blunders and gibberish, extremely interested in the misadventures of figures of speech and periods—of having derived enormous pleasure from his hesitations, stammerings and *lapsus linguæ*, of which I have composed a whole anthology for amusing conversation at meals.

I accuse myself, also, of having given certain sermons of my parish priest an absolutely malicious attention in order to discover errors and incongruities—even deplorable opinions which I wished might be heretical—for use as a cunning weapon against him.

I accuse myself of having gone to hear the great preachers solely out of snobbery because they were the rage—because they preached in smart churches and for fashionable people—and of having esteemed them solely to the extent that I imagined them to be in society, according to their theatrical poses, their way of flaunting themselves, their carriage of head, their studied gestures and drawing-

room behaviour, of having hoped to find in their orations political allusions, social digressions, subtle psychological analyses, malicious portraits of real people, quite platonic outbursts of indignation which have all the savour of righteous wrath and none of the disadvantages attaching thereto, bugle charges against absent enemies which give the illusion of battle and involve none of its dangers, purple patches in which the voice rises and the nerves are strung to a high pitch without any regrettable consequence, such as palpitation of the heart, and intimidations sufficiently vague and sufficiently literary to produce only a healthy shiver—of having thereafter waxed very prudently eloquent with friends of "the Society" on the admirable boldness of the Father, his knowledge of the times we live in, the necessary scandal he has no hesitation in giving, and of having taken part, by way of conclusion, in the gossip and small-talk which preaching so apt to contemporary manners cannot but produce—like so much gravel in pretty gardens.

In short, I accuse myself of seeking everything in such displays but the knowledge of God—and of having given them the same importance in my life as I give to afternoon tea.

I accuse myself of having given the same lethargic inattention, or merely snobbish attention, to my religious instruction as my preachers suffered, of having taken care to furnish my library with all the best-known authors—best known even for the worst reasons—without leaving even a dusty shelf for those unknown authors whose names, however, I happen by chance to know: St Augustine, St Ambrose and St Bernard. I have had the whole of Bossuet, to be sure, bound in morocco, because he is a genius classified in the text-books over which my grimy childhood grew pale.

I accuse myself no less, with regard to the Eagle of Meaux, of having read and understood him only to the very small extent that matriculation requires him to be read and understood; of recalling Bossuet, and Virgil too, now only as very far-off impositions on the days when I was kept in—and of associating the recollection of them with the memory of rain, and the odour of gas and wet clothes which perfumed our gloomy study-rooms. I accuse myself, therefore, of never disturbing the great bishop behind the dusted window and the dignified binding in which I have comfortably mummified him.

As for the other theologians and ecclesiastical writers, need I accuse myself—surely it goes without saying?—that I never begrudged the library of my worthy parish priest the possession of them, because I conceived that they would be out of place and uncomfortable in the house of a man of the world. I have, however, given Louis Bertrand's *St Augustin* hospitality beside the works of M. Marcel Prévost, of the French Academy, because he was a best-seller and a great success in the drawing-rooms.

I accuse myself, also, of not having in my house either the Bible or the New Testament; of never having read, although I am a distinguished Catholic and take my turn of watching by night before the Blessed Sacrament, the Gospels through, or any Life of Our Lord; of merely having listened to the curate of the week recite the Gospel for the Sunday at breakneck speed, not wishing to encumber myself with a missal too heavy to carry and not very elegant to look at, contenting myself with a tiny prayer-book, easily slipped into a pocket, or a rosary which enables me, without too great a strain on the mind, comfortably to kill the twenty minutes Mass lasts.

I accuse myself of having derived my knowledge of the words and actions of Christ almost exclusively from the cinema, where I admired the

magnificent film which cost a million or two, and also from Massenet's superb opera, *Mary Magdalen*, and again from Edmond Rostand's wonderful drama, *The Samaritan Woman*, in which Mme Sarah Bernhardt played as affecting a part as in *The Lady of the Camellias*.

I accuse myself of thinking that there is nothing wrong in that and of being convinced that the candle I carry hieratically in every procession is sufficient to enlighten me. . . .

OF IGNORANCE OF THE SAINTS

I accuse myself of being less familiar with the saints than with prehistoric heroes, and of being much more certain about Pirithous than about St Paul, about Calypso than about St Theresa—of having devoted, certainly against my will, the most radiant years of my youth to a mythology of a not very elevating kind—of having, in spite of so many exhortations against evil companions, rather inadequately appeased the crises of "the ungrateful age" by questionable association with the gods and the demi-gods—such improving society that, even in our time, it would excite the attention of the special police. . . .

I accuse myself of having heard with yawning and a shuffle of feet and tapping with a ruler,

during a reading which was called spiritual but which seemed to me to have very little spirit in it, Lives of the saints which I thought extraordinary —extraordinarily boring. Their adventures, their horrifying penances, contrasted with stories steeped in Hellenic voluptuousness, scandalized, without affecting the passivity of, my Christianity. I accuse myself of having so drifted into a worldly accommodation which enables the most repeated practices, in all sincerity, of a sensitive piety to be combined with an elegantly pagan state of mind and conception of life.

I accuse myself of having been apprehensive in the lives of the saints of the tyranny of the Absolute, "that lack of judgement" which makes them accept literally certain extravagances of the Gospel and, to the great harm of Religion, prevents them bringing God down to earth. I was brought up by an orthodox, well-bred family in the very up-to-date and rationalist religion of Impersonality, and I have always been apprehensive of the examples set by the saints as so many anarchical abscesses on the smooth face of Common Sense and the Conventions. Their spontaneity, above all, has been a shock to my frigid conception of reasonable virtue and organized dignity. Intellectually the moral world strikes me as a great pumpkin revolving in the sky, and it is extremely distasteful to me that

any unexpected or picturesque emotions should mar its spherical perfection.

Sanctity, as I understand it, ought to be rewarded by Montyon [1] prizes or by the Society for the Promotion of Good Works. The Academy of Moral Sciences is well qualified to define it in excellent little treatises written in grey ink.

To tell the truth, I do not accuse myself of having failed to appreciate all the saints. I have a boundless admiration for St Vincent de Paul, because everyone admits that he was a good philanthropist *for his time*. I am also extremely obliged to him for not having compromised our faith by any antediluvian mysticism or, at any rate, for having redeemed his mysticism — of which I know nothing — by the services he rendered Humanity. I also admit St Francis of Assisi because he was—by common consent—a sort of poet whom the world has forgiven for his folly, exorcizing it with literature. I am not absolutely repelled either by certain edifying features or trifling anecdotes recorded on monuments and,

[1] Baron de Montyon (1733-1820) bequeathed a considerable sum to the Institut de France, the income of which is distributed annually by the French Academy as prizes for (*a*) books most morally useful; (*b*) a poor Frenchman who has performed the most virtuous act in the year (*prix de vertu*); and (*c*) works crowned by the Academy of Science.

above all, by guides. They are part of the common stock and give no offence to anybody.

But I accuse myself . . . that's all.

I know nothing and I don't want to know anything about those heroes who have never known a Plutarch. But that won't prevent me, however, from killing a goose in honour of the Magi, or sacrificing a chicken or two and a bottle of wine on the patronal feast-day, or keeping an account with St Anthony and mobilizing St Expedit in case of need.

IGNORANCE OF CATHOLIC WRITERS

I accuse myself of having been profoundly ignorant of Catholic writers, past and present. I accuse myself of never having accused myself of such ignorance even before God, considering, no doubt, that the Church, like the Revolution, needs no men of learning. I am not very certain that ignorance of this sort is not a kind of fideism. I am rather inclined to think that it is just another aspect of my spiritual laziness.

I accuse myself, for example, of having confused Joseph de Maistre[1] with the Vicar of

[1] Ct Marie Joseph de Maistre was born at Chambéry in Savoy in 1754, and died at Turin in 1821. He was in St Petersburg from 1803 to 1817 as ambassador of the King

Savoy,[1] of having credited him with the *Journey round my Room*, of having allowed the writer of a column in the *Matin*, who dug up the title during the war on the day when the capital of Russia changed its name to Petrograd, to discover to me *Evenings in St Petersburg*. That first victory over the Barbarians did not inspire me to devote to de Maistre's *Evenings* the bored leisure of my own. And yet I was told somewhere or other —at the elementary school or a public meeting —that de Maistre and Bonald[2] were obscure

of Sardinia. An ardent ultramontane, he argued with remarkable force of logic and brilliance of rhetoric, forcing plain arguments to an irresistible conclusion much more easily denounced than answered. His *Soirées de St Petersburg* (2 vols., 1822), referred to in the text, is unfinished, but pregnant with strong thought and suggestiveness. It contains the famous panegyric on the hangman as the foundation of social order. His brother Xavier (1763-1852) wrote with a perfect mastery of simple narrative art the *Voyage autour de ma Chambre* (1794), a Sterne-like fantasy, with none of Sterne's sniggering, giving an account of a temporary confinement to his quarters in Turin.

[1] *The Profession of Faith of the Vicar of Savoy*, a rhapsody on natural religion based on sentiment rather than on reason, will be found in Book IV. of J. J. Rousseau's *Émile*. It takes the form of a record of a conversation on a summer morning at sunrise on a hill-top near Turin, before the glowing chain of the Alps stretching along the horizon.

[2] Viscount Louis Gabriel Ambroise Bonald (1753-1840) was compelled to emigrate during the Revolution to Heidelberg, and plied his pen on behalf of the Monarchy.

pamphleteers whom nobody read, but who had extolled the Inquisition and war, and calumniated Voltaire and the executioner.

Of Louis Veuillot,[1] I came in the end to learn a little of the bad said about him by his enemies, and I remember but imperfectly a line of Victor Hugo in which it is recorded that *concierges* kick his despicable pamphlets into the gutter. I know nothing whatever about Ozanam[2] except the St Vincent de Paul conferences, and it was only lately that I learned, between two lethiferous periods in a panegyric, that that eminent historian was not a business man. Of Lacordaire,[3] I know a remark which was made by Pascal and another

He also was an enthusiastic ultramontane and a steadfast opponent of the freedom of the Press and all projects of "democratic" electoral reform.

[1] Louis Veuillot (1813-1883), publicist and journalist, as editor of *l'Univers*, distinguished himself as an uncompromising champion of the Church. He was a zealous ultramontane throughout the Vatican Council, and, in addition to polemical pieces, wrote novels, poems and books of travel.

[2] Antoine Frédéric Ozanam (1813-1853), professor of foreign literature at the Sorbonne, left eleven volumes of historical and philosophical writings, but did not live long enough to realize his dream of rivalling the work of Gibbon.

[3] Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire (1802-1851), a barrister, became a Dominican monk in 1840, and was one of the greatest of modern French preachers and orators.

which belongs to Fontenelle.[1] I generously attribute to him, however, because of his reputation as an orator, the few maxims or apophthegms which lurk in the depths of my Saharan memory.

I accuse myself again, as President of the Catholic Reading Circle, of having only inspected the backs of the books with which we try to satisfy the intellectual hunger of the Children of Mary. I must, however, observe in exoneration that the well-nigh anonymous titles and fame of their authors are completely reassuring, while the length of time which elapses before they are brought back to us maintains our soothing belief that they are edifying without being too absorbing.

Again what we value most in the Catholic Reading Circle is the opportunity it affords comparatively innocent souls of *killing time without sinning to any great extent.* We consider the Circle, therefore, as just a harmless occasion of venial sins intended to canalize temptations and facilitate the avoidance of mortal sin. As a canon of profound experience once observed: "You are throwing ballast overboard, excellent salvage work."

[1] Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757) tried his hand at every form of literature, from idylls to tragedies, through satire, dialogues and critical essays, but is probably best remembered for his paradoxes and piquant phrases.

I accuse myself of having laid up in a napkin, like the servant in the parable, not only my single talent but the five and ten talents also of others, thinking them useless in regard to salvation, dangerous to humility and discipline—or even not thinking anything at all—sullenly owing the talent a grudge for being of some value, for being likely to involve me in some effort or other, or cause me some annoyance, as a poem brings refreshment to a hippopotamus.

I have, therefore, very carefully abstained from giving any encouragement to young writers, especially poets, even though they might be ever so much more Catholic than I.

Style in writing and poetry above all seem to be the occupation of an idler and as incompatible with the seriousness of life as with the seriousness of our Faith, and I draw no very great distinction between the chatter of a man of letters and that of a dentist. I could forgive young Catholic writers for being writers if they were members of the Academy, for being young if they were wealthy, for being Catholics if they were in fashion.

It seems to me, however, almost impossible for an unknown writer to have any talent, and his

arrogance is overweening when he sets out to become famous—by his own merit.

I can excuse anyone who has influential friends and plenty of self-assurance and, if he succeeds, I will give him part of the esteem which I now reserve entirely for a respectable millionaire who made a fortune speculating in guanos. It exasperates me to think of the attempts now being made to interest Catholics in intellectual men and their work, as though there were not already a great deal too many.

I have had to attend a good many meetings about the Catholic Press and I admit up to a point that an attempt should be made to compete with secular newspapers—but only on condition that Catholic publishers be business men or, at any rate, frugal workmen capable of subsisting on their cabbage leaves—without, therefore, considering themselves obliged to be rabbits!

It seems to me entirely proper that misfits easily pleased should be employed on the turning-out of the said Catholic Press or abstemious invalids costing very much less than a dog-clipper and, like a dog-clipper, capable only of handling scissors. I have no objection, however, to buying the Catholic newspaper from time to time in single issues for my servants to read.

But I receive on my doorstep, and so look

down upon, the canvasser, male or female, of what he or she describes as an apostolic work, who tries to wheedle me into becoming a subscriber or to offer a contribution.

If I had a contribution to make, it would be in the first place to present my church with a statue of St Anthony, my patron. There is one, to be sure, but it is only six feet high.

I accuse myself (in my heart I believe I pride myself upon it) of having drawn my purse-strings the more tightly in proportion as the object of the collection was the more spiritual: a shilling for the roof of the presbytery, a penny for the Catholic Institute. I subscribe to various monuments and to the local branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society because it fulfils a need. But there is no such need to read or listen to distinguished professors.

At any rate, it is a need which I have never felt, and yet I am, none the less, a man of property and a churchwarden.

THE OMISSION OF GOD IN LIFE

I accuse myself of having forgotten God in my life.

After having satisfied my faith by the twenty minutes' turn of duty a week, which, in my view,

defines the hundred-per-cent. Catholic, I made haste to return to the business of life. I left in church—not to find them again until a week later—the religious preoccupations—but they are not so terribly harassing—which constitute my baggage as a Catholic—if I were a lady, I would say my "vanity-bag."

I was immediately taken up again by that great maxim which ought to govern all human ideas: "Business is business." It would clearly be embarrassing to God to involve Him. A sense of tact and respect, moreover, constantly inclined me "to put *everything in its place*" and to consider "that there is a time for everything." It is clear that business takes up a great deal more time than prayer, but *primum vivere*, don't you think?

I have, therefore, given myself up to industry, finance and commerce in the same spirit as other men, without many more scruples, guided by the Code rather than the Decalogue, and leaving evangelical disinterestedness to idealists who are not primarily concerned "to boil the pot or to have bread in the larder."

I accuse myself, therefore, of having totally omitted to inquire if my fortune coincided with the glory of God.

Likewise in setting up my children. In the first

place my choice of a school for them was determined by absolutely practical considerations. The result is—I regret it—that my eldest son there lost the principles he inherited, but, on the other hand, found admirable outlets. The friendships he formed have been more than questionable, to be sure, from the narrowly religious point of view, but they are very distinguished and of the most profitable kind as regards his future. I am well aware that there is the eternal future, but everything will come right in the end. As soon as he "gets there," he will once more become as conservative as his father.

As for my younger son, I accuse myself in his case of having been rather apprehensive of, and rather restrained, the extravagances of a dangerous piety. Didn't he talk about a vocation to the secular priesthood or to a religious order? The perfect Catholic that I am could not evidently forbid him to indulge so sublime an ambition. But I prudently pointed out the drawbacks, one of the worst of which at the present day is impecuniosity. It would have been a great humiliation to me, I confess, to see a child so highly gifted bury all his talents in a country parsonage or a monastery.

As far as I am concerned, I am full of respect for "the reverend clergy," but I am a glorious exception, and it must be confessed that even in

respectable circles such a vocation arouses more astonishment and pity than admiration.

If my younger son had turned out in that way, our best friends—and yet they belong to the party of order—would have been scandalized. Therefore my father's conscience—not to say Catholic—tested and tried such premature resolutions time and again, and we were fortunate enough to marry off that irresolute young man to an American heiress whose religion is eminently reasonable. I must admit that he is not happy, but whose fault is that? He has everything he needs to be so and I have nothing to reproach myself with.

As for my daughter—I accuse myself if it is wrong, and I gravely doubt if it is, of having shown the most enlightened liberalism in the choice of her fiancé. Her mother and I made the most searching inquiry with regard to his economic situation and what expectations he might have. The result of our investigations is extremely reassuring. He is an only son, extremely well off already, and his mother, a widow, is very sufficiently aged.

These facts were enough for us, and I confess that we have not yet made any inquiry as to the rest. But I recall the words of the Gospel: "The rest shall be added unto you."

In my social relations I have forgotten, and caused it to be forgotten, as the most natural thing in the world, that I was a Catholic.

There are social relations imposed upon one. In such compulsory and distasteful encounters it is rather difficult to show oneself in one's true colours. I have, in fact, sometimes had an occasion to assert or, at any rate, to insinuate my faith, but I contented myself then with practising the avoidance of dangerous occasions.

There are social relations which chance provides and social convention suggests. I do not know that mine have any other foundation. And I have never entertained the old-fashioned idea of introducing any other considerations.

Our friends are, as a matter of fact, people of excellent standing, and we do not tolerate anybody not in Society. So we are frequent callers on Mr and Mrs M., a divorced couple, but the wife is a well-known singer and the husband is in the Civil Service; on Mr and Mrs G., Protestants of obscure origin, but they are believers, like ourselves, of good style and perfect religious discretion.

A few other families of very diverse dispositions

complete this panorama of our social relations. It goes without saying that extreme tact is required to avoid every question of importance and even the most transparent allusion: we are, however, well used to what my wife calls "social duties," and we are therefore careful, in such select circles, to refrain from any positive statement and not to attempt any kind of apostolate.

The "sacred union" of the drawing-room compels such discretion. We make the most laudable attempts "to do the right thing" and "to be in the swim," so that nothing shall mark us out from the others.

My wife is always afraid of being behind fashion and I behind opinion. I think that, being so, we serve our religion very effectively, although indirectly, by making people overlook the fact that we have any.

Is it not a refreshing thought to be able to say to oneself: "Apart from twenty minutes a week we are just like other folk?"

And is it impossible not to feel a little pride on hearing an ex-collector of taxes say with a sigh: "Ah! if only all Catholics were as broad-minded as you are!"

Such broad-mindedness goes to the least controversial commonplaces to find the secret of innocuous and charming conversations.

We find common topics with our hosts in the omnipotence of chance, the inevitability of destiny, and the tranquillity of death.

My wife, an extremely devout woman, once made bold enough to excuse a Carmelite among her friends by stoutly declaring that "nature caters for all tastes."

I motioned to her not to go so far, but that bold observation succeeded in winning the approval of the most diverse minds. On another occasion a Voltairian vulgarly abused Catholicism.

The conversation was about to become acrimonious when I cut it short with the following remark: "Mr So-and-so's convictions, like all ideas, deserve infinite respect." Everybody agreed, and the dignity of my interruption made a great impression.

When such conciliatory maxims fail, I content myself with evasive gestures and vague expressions: "It may be so . . . Possibly . . . It depends on how you look at it . . . In some cases . . ." I have a way of saying "Quite" which absolutely takes all the substance out of such an affirmation and the wall of private life is my supreme screen.

If it be borne in mind that this social life absorbs all the leisure my business allows me, it will be understood why Canon Fuss should thunder that I

have laicized my life. But Canon Fuss is one of those who compromise God by insisting on seeing Him everywhere.

THE OMISSION OF JUSTICE

I accuse myself of having forgotten that Justice is one of the cardinal virtues no less than Force, which I mistrust, and Prudence, which gives me confidence. Just as Prudence strikes me as a very appropriate brake upon Force, so Charity strikes me as a very salutary derivative from Justice.

Charity, as I conceive it, reassures me by its elasticity. Justice errs in declaiming, like Christ: "*Est, est. No, no.*" *Charity, as I understand it,* is compatible with much more dubitative verbs and sighs: "It may be so. That depends. We shall see."

Justice would mould me, whereas I manufacture *my own charities.*

Justice obliges me, whereas by *my charities* I like obliging others.

Justice is worth no gratitude to me, whereas *my charity* brings me in *at least* respect.

Justice is a payment, *my charity* is an investment.

Justice leaves me only the satisfaction of having done my duty, *my charity* gives me the pride of having exceeded it.

Justice makes me only an honest man, *my charity* consecrates me as a benefactor.

Justice does not choose its object, *my charity* carefully sifts its subjects.

Justice is of continual obligation, *my charity* picks its days.

Justice proceeds to the very end, *my charity* up to a certain point.

Justice is ever threatening, *my charity* all smiles.

Justice has no trumpet, but *my charity* has violins.

There are no fêtes, no bazaars, no balls given *for Justice.* The usage of society does not allow fairs to be held for the payment of one's debts or making good one's petty thefts.

Justice is neither amusing nor romantic. It does not admit of rhetoric or poetry, sport or showy dresses, or even the most discreet form of flirting. There might be something to be said for it if it concerned itself only with the poor, the *kindly, affecting poor*, whose virtuous, unctuous and respectful misery gives a piquant relish to the delicate enjoyment of *our charities.* But no, it *makes no exception of persons*; it can make me the slave of the public or the State, of gross people who revolt me, or tradesmen who make me shudder.

No society column is devoted to the activities and dress of ordinary folk who go and pay their

butcher and there run the risk of meeting their *concierge*, whereas a *charity* gathering presupposes a report sparkling with names which do honour to Paris and Israel alike.

Charity, *our kind of charity*, has facilitated profitable meetings and often been the occasion of romances . . . well, somewhat hazardous. *Our* charity accords very well with snobbery, and so everybody gets something out of it, even the poor. We live in a time, thank God! when advertising on behalf of the disinherited has attained the point of genius. The small box, out of which our cautious alms are distributed, is reinforced by clamour in the Press. It is certainly not dismal and desiccated Justice which could ever kindle such fine enthusiasm. It will never enter anybody's head, will it, to found prizes for virtue to help an honest man to honour his signature?

TRIFLES OF INJUSTICE

I accuse myself of never having attached the slightest importance to such trifles of injustice as consist, for example, in paying a small debt at the earliest, in settling a tradesman's account without endless delay, in returning a borrowed book, in not making somebody wait too long for a useful answer, in considering acts of carelessness

or failures to keep my word prejudicial to my neighbour by making him lose time, confidence and, as often as not, a favourable opportunity.

I had a friend, a charming, shy man. If he had had the courage to ask me for the five or six pounds which I kept neglecting to return to him, he might have taken the little holiday and enjoyed the few mouthfuls of air his poor lungs craved.

I was the customer of *a small shopkeeper* who could not wait for the happy days of the high cost of living to make a fortune . . . and lamented the while. His business failed for lack of credit and, doubtless, because many good Catholics, like me, immobilized to his detriment trifling dues, the sum-total of which might have saved him.

The poor man was afraid, for he belonged to the party of order, to appear revolutionary by presenting his bills to us, and as he had been brought up in the strictest respect, he trembled at the thought of failing in his duty to ladies and gentlemen in Society by allowing them to suspect, however remotely, even for a moment, that they owed him money. He had a very sensitive nature for *a grocer*. In fact, he made us a present of the interest on his anchovies and cucumbers with an air of dumbfounded gratitude. Every one of our unpaid orders overwhelmed him with an unctuous glory

which the bailiff, before the final curtain fell, failed to appreciate.

The man died in the service of a former debtor, who paid him chiefly with orders expressing his contempt, and fed him, as a friend wittily remarked, on stuffed rhinoceros.

I had a friend, a young man, with a magnificent future before him, who kept time with a stop-watch. He knew the natural and supernatural value of every minute. But he had not the necessary agility to catch up with the runaways, or the skill to turn them to account if the unexpected happened. Thanks to me or, more precisely, through my fault, he wasted hours "expecting me" in casual shelters, in doorways or in third-rate cafés, completely engrossed in consulting his only too accurate watch or in imbibing, although naturally most abstemious, very doubtful beverages. I so balked his ingenuous belief in the pledged word and the punctuality of men. He has not altogether become "one who doesn't worry," but he is my debtor, nevertheless, for a certain carelessness, and I had something better to give him.

I had promised to recommend him in high place. I was sincere but lazy, which again is one way of not being sincere at all. I postponed my application, either because it bored me to make it, or simply from an old habit of putting off to to-morrow

what I ought to do to-day. So I kept back his promotion and might have ruined his career. . . . Such elasticity in keeping my promises has made me miss any number of trains and cut any amount of appointments, as a result of which private or general interests are frustrated and enterprises, which might be successful, languish through uncertainty regarding the time-table or whether I shall turn up. . . .

I accuse myself particularly of having postponed for no reason letters and gestures of condolence and sympathy in bereavement, gratitude or affection, and of having thus outraged the sweetest and most terrible form of justice: the justice of the heart.

ON JUSTICE TOWARDS ONE'S ADVERSARIES

With regard to my adversaries I have on my conscience—or rather on my unconscionableness —a number of somewhat prejudiced actions and reactions. As for my omissions, they are, alas! as numerous as dots and dashes in a novel paid for at so much a line.

I accuse myself, therefore, of having refused to admit the genuine qualities or virtues of my adversaries, and of having tranquillized my still unquiet sense of honour by a very supple casuistry.

I have convinced myself, for example, that the necessity of combating a deplorable influence and the simple-mindedness of my audience necessitated a sweeping condemnation—any qualifications of my sincerity being apt to scandalize the weaker brethren.

I have even argued with myself speciously that the truth of a picture might be compromised by over-attention to detail, and that, in addition, particular merits did not prevent a man from being actively mischievous, and to admit *them* would serve merely to abet *the mischief*.

Such merits—they had been patent to me—shrunk away under my very eyes as my antipathy waxed the more eloquent. One cannot be both a plaintiff and an advocate. I came to the conclusion finally that my scruples had exaggerated and perhaps even invented the dark patch in a medal, the dazzling reverse of which hypnotized me. Besides, is it not written that a bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit? So I took my stand upon the Gospel, the better to hurl my "Raca!" or "Thou fool!"

I took my stand also upon the debatable tradition of apologists, as summary as they are prone to simplify, who consider that to distinguish is to confuse and to differentiate is to compromise. Intellectual laziness is thereby gratified and some-

thing else besides, which is best expressed in Latin, "*Homo homini lupus.*" You may add as a corollary the need and facility common to us all of converting the spirit of doctrine into the party spirit. Every man has a judge in his own heart and even an executioner who does not often go to sleep.

When, occasionally, I did not give them so much attention, I glided very lightly over the sympathetic features of my victims. I fixed them in an obscure and rapid incidental phrase, a sort of shamefaced parenthesis, immediately sucked in and engulfed by a spout of main contentions, or rather accusations. If I have sometimes laboured the good points of my adversary or enemy a little more than usual, it was in order to emphasize my impartiality and so to enhance the value of my indictment. A complaisant logic then enabled me noisily to assert that the good qualities of the culprit were so many aggravating circumstances. So I omitted to "*do justice*" to stray brethren of mine in my desire that they should only "*receive justice.*"

OMISSION TO REMEMBER THE HIGH COST OF LIVING

I accuse myself of having forgotten that the high cost of living was as vivid a reality for others

as for me. While bitterly lamenting that I had not quite tripled my profits, I heroically refused to double the salaries I paid, and I condemned the unbridled appetites of the lower classes.

It seemed to me scandalous that my cook and chambermaid should have asked again recently for a rise. I had to yield because the lack of domestic servants brought into play at my expense the *law of supply and demand.* This same natural law of political economy enabled me formerly to employ a numerous staff who were as hard-working as they were easily satisfied. Servants were then imbued with the spirit of sacrifice and employers with the spirit of *charity.*

But it is, above all, in regard to brain-workers that I considered the exchange crisis a fiction.

It seemed to me that a lecture, an article or a picture was royally paid for at pre-war prices. I have even a very definite tendency to consider the products of the mind . . . well, as priceless. It has always seemed to me an extraordinary thing that a philosopher, a lecturer, a writer, or a painter should receive any remuneration.

So I got a very poor writer to lend me all his works. I got another, whom I had asked to dinner, to present me with an autographed set of his, evidently forgetting that he ate *on other days* as well.

So, when I came to organize an evening in aid of my charities, I was able to get the gratuitous assistance, in the name of philanthropy, of a speaker and artistes, who came a very long distance third-class and had to be satisfied, through economy, with two cold meals.

I am a very good hand also at bargaining for pictures and getting them for a crust of bread from artists who are prevented by cramp in the stomach from waiting for fame.

I accuse myself in general of a quiet and innocent state of conscience, which allows me absolutely to forget the necessities of life where the unknown, the disregarded, the disinterested and the weak are concerned. I am honest enough in business with business men and those who have 'got there.' As for the rest, my relations with them have always seemed to me to depend on a very elastic, very optional kind of charity.

THE OMISSION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

I accuse myself of having forgotten that my inferiors were men and women—of having considered only what profit I could make out of them —of having exacted the maximum without bothering about a minimum for them of leisure, comfort, or moral or physical hygiene.

So I, a Catholic, opposed the social laws which guaranteed a weekly day of rest, restricted the hours of the working day, protected children, women in labour and the working-class family, provided pensions and assistance for the aged.

I discovered comminatory accents to condemn such outrages on liberty, and I evoked, when necessary, in a tremulous personification, the immortal principles or the patriotic necessity of super-production. To reassure my conscience, which, however, was little alarmed, I supported with my cautious pence beneficent enterprises, such as crèches, orphanages, industrial schools and sanatoria, opposing such initiatives of Christian charity to demagogic legislation, and so proclaiming that it is better to take care of one's victims than not to make any.

I have omitted to bestow my patronage on undertakings even of a social character (cheap dwellings, working-men's gardens and the like), for fear of that word "social," which a tiny "ism" unites to the worst form of heresy—perhaps, also, through unconscious hostility to everything appearing to encourage overmuch the dignity and personality of the worker.

I have omitted to reproach myself for the tuberculosis and alcoholism which my selfishness or negligence has made rampant around me. My

wife has, on countless occasions, without a word of protest on my part, condemned her sempstresses and dressmakers to work killingly late, to toil on Sundays, to go home late at night — a doubly perilous journey for young apprentices—in order to be able to show off in time a dress which was the "*dernier cri*," for the admiration in turn of the guests at our *soirées dansantes* and the parishioners of Ste-Clotilde.

When we gave such social receptions we entirely forgot that, next after food and education, sleep is a necessity inherent in man, even though he be a servant. While a Mass at midday enabled our scruples at last to snatch a well-earned rest, our staff were compelled to attend the earliest morning service, to miss it or to go to sleep at it.

We have also forgotten that even the poor are not spared temptation, and we have looked with a tranquil eye on the promiscuity of workrooms and garrets—rediscovering, to be sure, all the energy of the fiercest morality to stigmatize the lax behaviour of the populace and to throw into the street a poor thing who had "a misfortune."

And we did not think it any part of our duty either to bother ourselves with what our servants read or how they amused themselves, forgetting, to tell the truth, that they could possibly need any distraction.

We have often regretted the fact that the housemaid had been on such close terms of friendship with a fireman—who was found guilty of arson —forgetting that, if we had shown her a little affection, given her a little protection, she would not probably have prowled about the fire-station. My wife, to be sure, compels her to read edifying romances for recreation, but she prefers her romance with the fireman.

But we did not forget to send our household staff to the Easter retreat, which is given for all servants and in which they must be reminded of the duties they owe their superiors. We often send them even to take our places at the sermon, as, for example, last Good Friday.

I have an idea running in my head that St Veronica was a housemaid, whom her master and mistress, disciples of Jesus *in secret* and *detained by business*, had deputed to represent them at His Passion. In spite of all our devotion, our lackeys are sly, hypocritical and addicted to pilfering. They have even a mania for copying us—in our vices.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF CHARITY

There is a supernatural element in Charity which I have very frequently omitted to consider, and that is the special presence of God in the

poor. The words of the Gospel, "*as long as you did it to one of these . . . you did it to me*," are, in my opinion, merely a vague text to which only the credulity of the Middle Ages could have given a concrete form in pleasing legends.

But there is also a psychological element in charity with which I have not bothered myself to any greater extent. I have never made any serious effort *to observe* and *understand* the soul of the people. Those who praise in public congresses its spontaneity, its disinterestedness, nay, its delicacy, have always struck me as dangerous demagogues or appalling simpletons, whose only excuse could be the necessities of electioneering.

I confess that some directors of charitable enterprises alarm my social prudence by such ill-considered optimism. Methods of passive obedience based upon inviolable respect for distance are the only methods I can see my way to recommend. The slightest deviation therefrom scandalizes me and dries up the well of my canny contributions, every penny from which is carefully weighed out.

I scent a disastrous heresy in the propagation of what are called Study Circles. Upon the pretext of being given an individual training, urchins are allowed to have an opinion and express it. Teachers are committed to answering them, and discussing with them, whereas the essence of education, for

the humbler classes no less than children, is that they should be seen and not heard—unless they are first addressed. The best thing would be for them not to open their lips at all in the presence of their superiors. Our enterprises are much too numerous and much too accessible, and their object ought to be to keep the youth of the people from having any opinion, still more from feeling any enthusiasm other than for muscular development and sport.

I have always considered the lower classes as existing intellectually only by power of attorney. It therefore annoys me to see initiative and the sense of personal responsibility and dignity—"that is to say, honest pride or anarchy"—being encouraged among them.

Promoters here had the effrontery to retort to me that the real way to win their attachment is to understand them, and that persons were so secured, not ciphers, and that to acknowledge the fact, by seeking to develop the human value of even the humblest, was a way of paying respect to the true and interior order appointed by God; that far from doing harm to the principle of authority, it so became the more respected and the more highly regarded, and, moreover, that the unpopularity of certain very Catholic gentlemen was due to the entirely mechanical rigidity of their ideas and attitude.

They even went on to say that the closer these gentlemen had attempted to get to the working classes and the poor in Catholic Study Circles and conferences of the St Vincent de Paul Society, the more remote they had seemed to be.

They accused us of speaking a vague, emphatic and out-of-date language, and of not having the faintest inkling of the good or evil activity which may be going on in people's minds, or the extremely complex sensibilities which our age has produced in their souls and nerves.

They have had the effrontery to say that we have almost a monopoly of commonplaces and that we remain bogged, outside reality, in the dignified morass of our sterile platitudes.

They are rude enough to say that to do some good to the most outcast pariah, it is not enough to go under his roof, that his soul must be visited. . . . If all that were anything but deplorable rambling nonsense, the most highly respectable gentlemen, myself included, would have greatly sinned . . . by omission.

SOUND CRITICISM OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

I accuse myself of having constantly omitted to resemble the Good Samaritan. I must even confess that that page in the Gospel stands in need of

considerable explanation to soften its asperities. I should like to hear some preacher say that Our Lord Jesus Christ forced the note to attract attention, or some commentator explain that the translation of the Vulgate is more defective here than elsewhere, and, moreover, that allowance must be made—a large allowance—for Oriental exaggeration.

This Samaritan is, in the first place, a kind of heretic, or, at all events, a dissenter. He had no business to give a lesson in humanity to a Levite, and still less to a priest. If the Levite and the priest passed by, it was doubtless because they had excellent reasons for so doing. The Samaritan, on the other hand, gives me the impression of having been a creature of impulse. He did not even take time to think before succouring the dying man. He did not even feel a moment's hesitation, and yet hesitation is the criterion of Wisdom. I find some difficulty in not thinking that he has disgraced and profaned the very idea of Charity, by investing it with *no precaution* and, consequently, with *no respect*. If Charity becomes instinctive, it ceases to be charity and becomes merely a very dangerous form of *anarchy*. There is an element of Sovietism in the case of this Samaritan. For he took it into his head *without any preliminary inquiry* to succour—who? *Anybody at all.*

Anybody at all: a man left half dead by robbers. But the dying man might have been a robber himself, whom other robbers, less addicted to banditry, had assaulted through some relic of scruple. He might have been some quarrelsome devil or one of those reckless people who risk their lives to save their purses. He might have been a vagabond or a night prowler. What was he doing on the road when robbers were about? I have always noticed that the victims of assaults are very undistinguished people. Honest folk do not go out very much, they carry very little money in their pockets and are armed to the teeth. They only frequent places which are well patrolled by police. The Good Samaritan's patient was at the least *a scatterbrain*. Even though he had been a Doctor of Israel, his benefactor should, first of all, have satisfied himself with regard to his situation.

If respectable gentlemen behaved like the Good Samaritan, *Charity* would develop into an encouragement to vice and laziness, which are the father and mother of Poverty. The Samaritan had not even the good sense to confine himself to a trifling alms or a few kind words. He took care of an individual, a complete stranger to him, *as though he were his brother*. He restored to Society a weak creature, useless, if not noxious, a disturber, perhaps, of the established order. He wasted his

time, his oil and his wine, when the cost of living is so high! He set the dying man upon his own beast and himself went on foot. There are people who spoil business and a man's trade: in the same way the Good Samaritan spoils *Charity*.

If his example were better known, certain ladies and gentlemen would be taken for Pharisees, and that would be very prejudicial to Religion properly understood. Moreover, the Good Samaritan must have abandoned some social or family duty to practise such eccentricities. I would even wager that he cannot have *returned to his office at the proper time*. He therefore committed a dishonest act in regard to his boss, as he was dishonest towards the innkeeper, by confiding to his care an unknown wounded man—that is to say, an individual who might have been *dirty in his habits and lousy*—as he was dishonest in regard to his children or other dependents, by wasting money which should have gone to them.

I am well aware that he saved a dying man, but I wonder if that is a sufficient excuse.

THE DUTIES ONE OWES ONESELF

I accuse myself of having omitted to try to discover any meaning whatever in the familiar expression: *the duties one owes oneself*. I have

no doubt actively concerned myself about my own future, and have taken very good care not to be like the birds of the air or the lilies of the field. I have even taken a considerable number of precautions in view of the day after the morrow of my death. I have asked and obtained not only my daily bread, but bread for the evening of my days and for my heirs, both direct and collateral. I am a passionate believer in Insurance, and I have insured myself, as far as possible, in regard to the future life and against Everlasting Fire.

But, though I have neglected none of my interests, including also my salvation, the suspicion never for a moment crossed my mind that I was under any obligation to maintain or develop my personal value. It is a word which I find impossible to translate in the singular. The parable of the talents has never had any terrors for me. And yet I have not even attempted to hide them in the earth in order to preserve them.

I never even wondered if I had received any. My worth as a Catholic no more concerns me than a puzzle in heraldry troubles a zoophyte. That is one form of pride I have forgotten to indulge. Preachers who rightly attribute the decline of faith to fear of "what people will think" are perhaps wrong in not throwing light on this hermetical commonplace. We are afraid

of " what people will think," because we have not been sufficiently taught to have proper self-respect. That fear derives from a false notion of humility which in too many cases obliterates *consciousness of one's own personality.*

It may, also, perhaps derive from a defective instruction in Religion, such as would inculcate only *the necessity and utility of our beliefs*—and their grandeur and beauty hardly at all—and omit to emphasize *the expansion and elevation* of individual life which they bring to all our faculties and our very nature.

Like many excellent Catholics, I have never paused to reflect on the *positive aspect* of "*habitual*" grace. I have considered the state of grace simply as the absence of sin, like a clean sheet before the bar officer of heaven. This idea makes me first of all *avoid doing and stop myself doing* . . . things. The picture it conveys to my mind is chiefly one of pitfalls and railings. An aspect so entirely negative and terrifying is probably not designed to develop generosity and value to any great extent.

And so I failed to perceive the power of initiative and human expansion which Grace confers upon the saints. They struck me as creatures who had retreated from life and from themselves—rather like the timid who abandon the main road for fear of motor-cars.

I accepted literally certain awful forms of expression, and I really believed that the saints had "*annihilated and exterminated themselves*," so as to sin no more, by utterly ceasing to be; that they suppressed their minds, their hearts and their bodies as far as possible, so as to suppress the instruments of sin. I did not realize that they mortified themselves in order to vivify themselves, that they killed the old man in order to resurrect and develop the young one, and that they had the greatest respect for their own energies and individual value.

Having no understanding of sanctity, I therefore considered it as a diminution, an anachronism, an anomaly. There can be no true religion without the understanding and appreciation of sanctity—that is to say, of individual moral perfection; but my own practice of devotion is shrivelled up in exterior rites and tawdry expedients, rather ashamed of itself and prepared for every kind of strategic retreat.

I have, therefore, totally omitted to think that habitual grace is a very different thing from a mere form of inertia; that it is not a sort of lightning conductor; that it is the most royally fruitful form of friendship, because it is the friendship of God; that it is the most magnificent nuptial garment, because it is the seamless robe whitened by the

blood of the Lamb—that it is, in a word, that fearful thing, the life of God in us : God Who thinks, God Who acts, God Who loves, through our minds, our wills, our hearts. It is the very goal and object of Christianity. It is the estuary in which all the sacraments—the seven streams of Paradise regained—meet and commingle. It is the culminating point of the ancient human pride, exorcized and canonized: to become like gods —and of the eternal divine dream: to become man.

Can any philosophy show such an apotheosis of personality? If Catholics did not omit to think about such truths, they would have too lofty a consciousness of themselves to retain any *respect for what the world thinks*. And they would not believe that mediocrity can be advantageously substituted for the four cardinal virtues.

OF THE DUTIES ONE OWES ONE'S MIND

I have totally, and at all times, omitted to realize that a Catholic owes it to *his God*, *to his Church*, *to his time*, and *to himself to be of some value intellectually*.

Apart from religious instruction, which I have long since relegated to the lumber-room, it has never occurred to me that intellectual life could

possibly be *in itself a form of superiority, a source of joy* and *a duty*. It seemed to me solely a subject for essays and compositions, a matter of dates and queries, leading up to the spring-board of scholastic successes, whence one dived off into examinations.

Homer and Virgil disclosed themselves to my notice behind the formidable entrenchment of dictionaries, like sentries who had first to be disarmed before you reached the barbed wire of matriculation.

Some less utilitarian gleams, however, occasionally broke through the darkness of my gloomy studies. I was stimulated by visions of glory at a laureate prize-giving, and my horizon extended as far as the platform, whence the medals and books were distributed. A certain pride, adorned with filial emotion, filled my childish heart on the day when my teacher said, in the presence of my mother, that I had scored full marks.

From that day onward I became the model good pupil, impelled not only by a laudable ambition 'to get there,' but also by a nobler ambition to score full marks. I had a booby beside me who waxed enthusiastic about the heroes of Corneille, whereas I pondered over the passages which were most likely to be set in the examination. I ground away at respectable authors, such as M. Désiré

Nisard,[1] so as to be in a position to give a résumé of their most hackneyed observations on the conflict between duty and passion, and to quote their most decisive formulæ without a mistake.

As for history, I was always fortunate enough to overwhelm my competitors under an avalanche of dates and proper names. In other examination subjects, I always maintained the superiority assured by the mathematically exact observance of schedules.

I always, indeed, ruled out for myself, with invariable severity, any reading or any personal excursion outside the prescribed lectures and books. My higher studies were pursued with the same success, due to the same method. While working for my B.A., I was sincerely sorry for such of my fellow-undergraduates who became fired with enthusiasm for or against any particular opinion or any particular author. I discussed with serious-minded students what an advantage it would be to be asked such-and-such a question by such-and-

[1] A French journalist, critic and professor at the Sorbonne, the author of (*inter alia*) a once standard *History of French Literature*, in which the measure of an orthodox and rigid 'classical' judgement was severely applied to the writers of France and their works. His name is attached also to a series of Latin authors, edited by him in collaboration, with accompanying French translations. Nisard died in 1888, at the age of eighty-two.

such a professor; what questions were most frequently set by one and what answers one should carefully avoid giving to another.

So we were able to draw up a regular catalogue of the habits and prejudices, the manias, crankinesses and whims of the Faculty, and, by a strategy equal to our memory, score as far as possible full marks!

The result, thank heaven! was just what we expected. We passed *every examination and in all subjects* with distinction. The trick had been so well acquired that I might have gone on passing examinations until the end of my days, if that respectable amusement had constituted a career. The result, again, in my case, was an absolute lack of ideas and a very nearly absolute lack of literary and artistic taste.

I never open my classics now, and I do not read any modern books or the reviews to which for form's sake I subscribe. I consider the former useful as long as they are officially prescribed—and the latter admissible if they are the fashion, and that's all.

It does not occur to me that a mind can be truly religious only if it is accessible to light and beauty; that a man is truly human only if, instead of reciting, he uses his mind—only if he loves exalted conceptions and noble forms for other reasons than

their mere utility. My conversation is exclusively concerned with motor-cars, aeroplanes and the various kinds of machinery utterly unknown to those ancient authors whom I used to take to pieces and assemble again so mechanically! . . .

PROFESSIONAL VALUE

I accuse myself of having forgotten that professional value is a duty which a man owes to himself as much as to the cause to which he testifies and of which he is the banner.

I have valued, in the first place, occupations involving little initiative, limited responsibility and a total absence of risk. This is logical enough on the part of a man who considers Catholicism above all as an *Insurance Company on Eternal Life.*

In the various occupations in which they engage, such people retain to the end the soul of the official and the employee. They are not unpunctual, they have a certain method in their ideas, but they lack enthusiasm and have no inventiveness. What they value most in trade, for example, is the regular return of small profits and the faithful attachment of a few old customers.

Such stationary advantages exempt them from the bother of introducing new articles or adopting

new methods. They might engage in big undertakings and reach the vast public : they prefer the steady return of their small profits. Instead of taking by assault, they prefer to nibble away. They *nibble* their clerks, they *nibble* their customers. By modest accumulations of pennies—snatching in one place a reduction of wages, craftily devising increased prices in another—they succeed in making both ends meet, very solidly too. They are not only incapable of disinterestedness in itself, but also of that merely provisional disinterestedness which the business man affects who sacrifices a sprat to catch a herring. They will never establish any enterprise, or themselves. The development of their business and their own importance would frighten them like an abscess about to burst.

They accumulate, however, very respectable fortunes, and reach an honourable retirement in a villa, with hot and cold running water, and a churchwarden's pew. Because they never staked on anything but a certainty. Their customers were so patiently resigned that they put up with every kind of mortification and accepted any old goods. Such resignation reaching the point of complaisance, they never made any attempt to get rid of antiquated stock, because they were certain that dust, however ancient, would never render unsaleable even the most obsolete merchandise.

Their sons and successors will be able, when their turn comes, to muddle along to the same tune and with the same success on such peaceful deposits. They are too strong for any economic or political revolution, and they will continue to find, on the shabbiest terms, anæmic and incapable assistants, giving poor service or none at all, as unprepossessing as they are unfortunate, forgetting orders, delivering them late or all wrong, making mistakes in addresses or figures, bungling invoices, collecting blunders and errors with the enthusiasm of a philatelist.

And this kind of business or industry will go on for ever, humbly but steadfastly remunerative. If they were seized, like Harpagon,[1] with an access of frenzy, they would have painted up in letters of gold on their faded signboards the commonplace legend which is the explanation, the abstract and the conservation of the philosophy of *small business*: "Little streams make big rivers."

It is obvious that such a manner of conceiving professional value does no great credit to a man or a trade or a business, or a man's country or Catholicism. It is not very gratifying either when one is compelled to hear with reference to some shoddy piece of work, carelessly done, behindhand, performed or delivered in antediluvian

[1] The miser in Molière's play, *L'Avare* (1668).

conditions or obsolete methods: "What can you expect? It comes out of a Catholic shop." It is unfair, especially *at the present moment*, but such an opinion—say, if you like, such a prejudice—would disappear, if we had not forgotten to be in our profession, as in everything else, enthusiastic and enterprising.

How sad it is to see that those who should rely upon God venture *nothing anywhere*, and crouch in the back-shop of prehistoric booths, accumulating bethumbed and greasy notes in their worm-eaten drawers. They are not so numerous as they were, to be sure, but we should have no more among us who can be so oblivious of *the duty to live.*

THE CULTIVATION OF SENSIBILITY

I accuse myself of having described as cracked or modernist, whichever you prefer, a preacher who laid stress upon the duty to cultivate one's sensibility.

For my own part, I have omitted, with pious implacability, to observe such a novel and singular commandment. I have even considered the invariability of my temperature, when confronted either with ignominies or magnificences, as the highest platform of equilibrium. Enthusiasm and indignation strike me as symptoms of a very

dangerous lack of rhythm. The happy tendency I evinced in my schooldays to stuff my memory, without ever distressing my aorta, has, thank heaven! saved me many a blunder.

Enthusiasm, our deluded preacher declared, presupposes admiration and the gift of oneself. It magnifies man by wrenching him out of his egotism and making him communicate with an ideal. I will spare you his fuliginous expatiations on the religious, social and superior human character of admiration and spontaneous renunciation. I will pass over the anathemas hurled by his virulent heterodoxy against bourgeois souls (that is to say, sober-minded people, who don't allow themselves to be taken in).

Doesn't the essence of morality consist in not being taken in and always retaining perfect self-control? It is the strength of us sedate and steady folk that we never go to extremes, that we make allowance for circumstances, that we never force the note, that we weigh the *pros* and *cons*, that we see farther than the end of our noses, that we never run directly counter to anything, that we never provoke comment, that we never attempt the impossible, that we first catch our hare before cooking it, and that we never forget that a fire which burns long is better than a fire which burns bright. . . . These are clearly not the principles

upon which the Crusades could have been fought, and they were but a meagre source of inspiration to St Francis, but I have heard tell that the Crusades were a failure and that St Francis is the more admirable as he is to be the less imitated.

"Admirable" has always seemed to me to mean strange or, at all events, alien to a well-ordered life. I admire occasionally, but only on request. My admiration is merely part of the ritual of my social life. Just as formerly I knew by heart the appreciations or criticisms *appropriate* to any particular author, so I cull my information from the newspapers most read in the fashionable world and from those best qualified to express an opinion as to the praise to be accorded, the criticism to be offered, the reserve to be maintained in regard to any particular subject, work or writer, according to the best canons of the most highly esteemed circles.

It goes without saying that my purely phonographic admirations are never compromised by any personal emotion or expression, and so never expose me to the risk of any imprudent outburst of generosity. I make up, to be sure, for this self-possession by a verbal overflow of superlatives. Thus I would attribute very considerable merit to a gentleman with a great reputation and I would not be content with declaring a successful work to

be merely interesting. I would assert it, by raising my tone upon the adverb, *absolutely* remarkable and *quite* first-class. It may be that success is capable of firing me with a degree of enthusiasm.

At all events, I am less indisposed to the feeling of indignation. There is no question, of course, of any of the sturdy hatreds mentioned by Alceste.[1] Spontaneous and profound indignation presupposes a force of conviction and disinterestedness still more suspect and dangerous than enthusiasm.

It is, at all events, dirty water from the same barrel which is called personality. You can see at a glance what careful plans it can bring to naught, what irritation it can provoke, what results it can compromise. The straight line is not, as is so often stupidly repeated, the shortest distance between two points, for the very good reason that it ends nowhere. The best way is the winding one with zigzags. Indignation, which claims to be the straight line, may be geometry, but is certainly not calculation.

Are not religion and morality, however, something like the calculation of probabilities? There is, I am wont to say, one form of indignation which, at any rate, I do understand, and that is the indignation convention feels against independence,

[1] The disillusioned and savagely embittered hero of Molière's *Misanthrope*, 1666.

and Everybody against Someone. As regards any idea, any form of art or mode of action not current, I feel myself overcome by a ferocity which is all the more ferocious for being collective. Where morality is involved, I keep my thunderbolts not for the most guilty but for the least entitled. The said thunderbolts, moreover, wait to be hurled until other thunderclaps have first rent the sky. I thunder only in chorus.

The scandalous preacher I mentioned at the beginning will, no doubt, be severely criticized, and I shall not be the last—or the first, naturally, to give him a kick. The idea! To maintain that enthusiasm and indignation are a symptom and a development of our human value, that such human value contributes to the development of our supernatural value, and so to the glory of God, is an intolerable proposition. We are not accustomed to that, thank God!

THE DUTY TO LOVE BEAUTY

That blessed preacher, through the complaisance of a too accommodating clergy and a too indulgent audience, went on with the series of his scandalous paradoxes.

He discoursed to-day on the *duty to love beauty*;

We owe it to ourselves, apparently, to cultivate an artistic sense.

It is a disastrous omission not to attempt to acquire or develop it. God and His firmament are beautiful. We draw nearer to them by being able to appreciate their harmonies, lines and colours.

It is a way, said he, of becoming acclimatized beforehand to the Paradise of all splendours. So that Bœotians and Philistines will doubtless be obliged to pass through a purgatory which, in their case, will be a studio of æsthetics. He went on, I think, to say that, being temples of the Holy Ghost predestined to the attributes of glorified bodies, we were obliged to a kind of spiritual coquetry in our tastes no less than in our conduct.

I even believe—may God forgive him!—that he spoke of moral elegance in the first place, but also of elegance *simpliciter*, without refinement or pretentiousness, or affectation, he added, for decency's sake—I should say so.

And all this on the pretext of worshipping God, Whose handiwork and witnesses we are in the world.

He rather redeemed these astounding statements by an attack—but a rather deplorable attack—on fashion and snobbery.

But if, *per impossibile*, he happened to be right, I should not be one of the *small number of the elect*.

I have never been able to convince myself that poetry could be anything but a distraction or an anomaly.

I am willing to concede at a pinch that rhymes may be strung together *to kill time*, I have even a number of friends who in their leisure moments can turn a compliment in verse for a family festival or the arrival of His Lordship the Bishop —or even compose a little song about a lady or gentleman. It is a game far inferior to bridge or poker; an agreeable social accomplishment which I admire without envy.

I have also a conventional smile when I say that Mr A. or Miss B. is a poet on occasion. As for such as are more so, in season and out of season, I regard them as eccentric ne'er-do-wells.

Poetry in itself strikes me as a lack of balance and judgement.

When they try to make me feel the poetry of nature and religion, of churches and ritual, I cannot think that all that or myself is being taken seriously. If there is one thing opposed to poetry —that is to say, to licence and frivolity—it is certainly nature, with its scientific laws, and religion, with its moral laws.

What I appreciate most in a cathedral is not some vague imaginary soul, but the solidity of the stonework and the construction, the certainty of

the craftsmanship, the time and the expense of money it represents.

Like a party of American soldiers on a visit to the cathedral of Le Mans, I would willingly exclaim in admiration: "What a wad of dollars that represents!"

Poetry and the other arts annoy me because they are the products of imagination, the offspring of a madwoman "in a fine frenzy rolling"; she should be chained up and not allowed to go wandering at large, like a dog without a collar.

The preacher is willing to admit that the woman is sometimes mad, but he maintains that madwomen are to be looked after, and even to be taken out for walks in charge of their keepers.

We are not entitled, according to him, to do away with them, because we are not entitled to mutilate ourselves.

He devoted a whole paragraph to showing how vigorous and beneficent imagination was in the case of the saints. I could not make head or tail of it. Imagination, being the exact opposite of reality, can only lead us into error. Such is my robust and invariable point of view.

This is the reason why I was not disposed at school to sacrifice my preparation for examinations in the slightest degree to what are called "accomplishments." Therefore, while I have no

objection to my daughter strumming on the piano, because it is the accepted thing, I should be very distressed if she turned out to be a genuine musician.

I agree that there must be somebody to tinkle the harmonium in church, but that, thank heaven! requires no particular skill, or any training to speak of.

I wish they would once and for all stop worrying us with their Church music, their Gregorian chant, Palestrina polyphony, and the rest of it. What I like best is hymns sung to a good marching tune, to the accompaniment of an ophicleide. Let us have good rousing tunes.

As for painting and sculpture, I don't bother at all about them. Only I have heard it said that occupations of this sort do not often boil the pot for those who indulge in them. And I cannot consider such a profession as serious—as long as business men continue to survive.

I have, however, a few pictures at home which I picked up at an auction sale, the auctioneer having drawn my attention to their life-like appearance and admirable verisimilitude. I have also an oak cupboard at home of very good style. I like it because I paid a lot for it and it came out of a château.

I have, therefore, done nothing to cultivate my taste. The practical sense, on the other hand,

of which I have an abundant supply, gives me no elegance of any kind.

But what does it matter? I am a first-rate business man and I make my Easter communion with humility. . . .

FORGETFULNESS OF PERSONALITY

I have, therefore, forgotten with exemplary regularity that I was worth the blood of a God and that the habit of His grace could make me divine. I have forgotten, with no less exactitude, the very notion of my own human value. My very straitened conception of the supernatural life has inclined me to eschew as dangerous the culture of my individual nature and my faculties.

I have, therefore, prudently refrained from having any opinion of my own and, as they say nowadays so clumsily, any *personal reaction* to the most controversial events and men. Not only have I been apprehensive of any personal opinion, but also in the sphere of liberties which the Church leaves to the initiative of her children, all that my eye could detect was *one long series of snares.* Everything *novel*—and by novel I mean everything not a mere *repetition*—seems to me to smack of heresy.

If it is a question of some proposition utterly

unknown to the teaching of revelation, then my nervous orthodoxy immediately rears, and begins to sniff violently. It would feel absolutely comfortable only if every political, social, literary, artistic and other idea were *defined and thundered forth in canons bristling with anathemas.* It is probable that such a scruple in my case is nothing but the fear of living. Anything that disturbs my passivity gives me scandal.

Certain manifestations by spiritual authority even have upset my religious equanimity. The Encyclical of Leo XIII. on the condition of the working-classes, for example, and that of Pius X. on the Communion of children, seemed to me rash, like everything which disturbs the rhythm, or rather the gentle purr, to which the ears of the pious are accustomed.

Moreover, it has always been my impression that the peculiar function of authority, of the authority of the Church in particular, was always to condemn somebody or something. I conceive authority perfectly as a brake, but not at all as an engine. My integralism stands aghast at the novel character of certain enterprises and their multiplicity. The behaviour of certain Catholics and —why seek to conceal it?—of certain eminent ecclesiastics, nay Eminences, is disconcerting to my immobile point of view. Everything *downright*,

daring and innovatory in conduct, in the style of a sermon no less than the tone of a book, seems to me a sort of heresy in comparison with that reassuring orthodoxy, *the platitude.* If you modify any detail in the façade, you seem to me to destroy the house. My habits have become my dogmas.

A fashion of speaking or singing or playing music or painting or doing sculpture, which upsets the crystallization of my mind, seems to me to border close on an iconoclastic assault. A way of life or amusing oneself otherwise than in accordance with accepted standards strikes me as a kind of immorality, *all the more dangerous for being so elusive.* It goes without saying that my moral ultramontanism is tainted with Phariseeism. If it strains out the gnat, what camels it swallows, what mortifications it has to put up with!

The horror I feel at personality in others derives, therefore, from the absence of it in myself. The cause of it all in the last analysis is forgetfulness and misappreciation of that great law of Catholicism—that God is the God of the living, not of the dead . . . or of gramophones. Having omitted or failed to understand the meaning of this, I have come in the end to make my Catholicism the accomplice of my impotence and my sloth. My faith has become my suicide.

I accuse myself of having confused humility with *fear* and *self-effacement*.

I have always had a holy terror of risk, considering that the "birds of the air and the lilies of the fields" are deplorable specimens of improvidence and that the evil thereof is not sufficient to the day, modifying as follows the fourth petition in the *Pater*: "Give us this day bread for our old age."

Every kind of *initiative* has seemed to me a dangerous indication of individualism. I have confused the *narrow path* of the Gospel with *ruts*, and I have thought myself lost every time I was unable to follow the regular channel or go with the crowd. Personal action has always struck me as a form of indecency within the mischief of the Sixth Commandment.

It has always seemed to me that sustained effort, close attention and diligent execution in any enterprise should never rise above a *certain average level*: otherwise they would become a *kind of impropriety* and a *sort of challenge*. Everything which reveals a man too much partakes of immodesty. My favourite motto is that one should never be too much in evidence. I admit that one

should be successful: I am shocked at any too positive statement and, while I bow before honours, honour worries me. For honour is a sentiment which admits no nice variation of degree or any accommodation: it goes too far and commits itself too much.

Its twin brother, character, is no more reassuring. Character is a poor tactician, never goes to work obliquely, and makes no provision for a strategic retreat. You will always find me gracefully avoiding, with pious alacrity and unctuous modesty, the slightest responsibility. Self-effacement and obedience are for me two havens of grace where I shall ride for ever at anchor. I am, therefore, far removed from being an anarchist, for while authority itself, when it clothes a man, is distasteful to the phobia I feel for any kind of virile action, it is for me, thank God! *a plenary dispensation from any kind of personal existence.*

My parish priest may tell me that such an ignoble conception of docility is apt to bring that virtue into disrepute and a plea for revolution: no matter. He may keep on saying: "A mediocre man is always a revolutionary because he suffers transcendence instead of accepting it, as a revolutionary is always a mediocre man because he attempts to abolish it"—in vain. I shall continue to grow old, without exhausting myself, in my

villa, which looks like a railway station, by the side of a road which looks like a level-crossing.

. . . . . .

I have been goaded to accuse myself of omissions which for me are *a soft pillow*. The wild men who talk about *the absolute* and *heroism*, about *justice* and integral *charity*, about *human value* and *personality*, have not the remotest understanding of our bourgeois equilibrium. My conscience reassures me against them, gently whispering to me after dinner, in the aroma of a cigar, that "God does not require so much," that "anyone striving to become an angel ends by becoming a devil," that "excess in all things is to be avoided," that "a man who wants to travel far should look after his steed," that "one should take and leave," that "one should not have any ambition to distinguish oneself but quietly continue on one's own jog-trot way."

My experience of fishing has also taught me that "not everyone is a born fisher of men." Every one to his trade and the cows will be well kept. One must learn to sail sometimes between two currents, and in all circumstances "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

Such is the low-water mark of my philosophy. But, unlike the Seine, it never rises. . . . .

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